

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) An absorbent article having a front portion and a rear portion and comprising an outer sheet that provides an outer surface of the absorbent article, an inner sheet disposed on the inner side of the outer sheet, and a plurality of elastic members for making below-waist gathers disposed between the outer sheet and the inner sheet,

wherein a patterned sheet having a pattern is disposed between the outer sheet and the inner sheet in the widthwise middle area of at least one of the front portion and the rear portion, the elastic members each have:

(a) a portion contributory to elastic extensibility and contractibility in each of the regions outside the lateral sides of the patterned sheet; and

(b) a portion substantially non-contributory to elastic extensibility and contractibility that are cut fragments of adjacent elastic members that contribute to elastic extensibility and contractibility, and which are separate and distinct fragments from the adjacent elastic member from which they are cut, disposed between the patterned sheet and the inner sheet in the region inside the lateral sides of the patterned sheet; and

wherein the cut fragments of elastic members are formed by pressing elastic members of continuous length together with the patterned sheet and the outer sheet with a pressing member having projections providing dots.

2. (Original) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein the outer sheet has a total transmittance of 55% or higher.

3. (Cancelled)

4. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein the cut fragments are formed by pressing elastic members of continuous length together with the patterned sheet with a pressing member having projections providing dots, the projections being arranged only in the area where a main pattern of the patterned sheet is absent.

5. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein the cut fragments are formed by pressing elastic members of continuous length together with the patterned sheet with a pressing member having projections providing dots, the projections being arranged in both the area where a main pattern of the patterned sheet is present and the area where the main pattern is absent, the individual dots having an area of 0.001 to 30 mm², and the total dot area ratio in the area where the main pattern is present being lower than that in the area where the main pattern is absent.

6. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article of claim 1, wherein the cut fragments are formed by pressing elastic members of continuous length together with the patterned sheet with a pressing member having projections providing dots, the projections being arranged substantially uniformly over the entire area of the patterned sheet.

7. (Original) The absorbent article according to claim 1, which is a pull-on absorbent article.

8. (Original) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein the outer sheet is a nonwoven fabric.

9. (Original) The absorbent article according to claim 8, wherein the nonwoven fabric has a basis weight of 5 to 30 g/mm².

10. (Original) A process of producing the absorbent article according to claim 1, comprising the steps of disposing a patterned sheet at an interval on a running outer sheet of continuous length, continuously introducing elastic members of continuous length between the outer sheet with the patterned sheet on and a running inner sheet of continuous length, bonding the inner sheet to the patterned sheet side of the outer sheet to form a laminate, and cutting the elastic members of continuous length by pressing a pressing member having projections against the region where the patterned sheet is disposed.

11. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein a hot-melt adhesive is over a stock sheet except for the region inside the lateral sides of each patterned sheet where the below-waist elastic members are disposed or the adhesive is over the stock sheet except that the amount of the adhesive applied to the region inside the lateral sides of each patterned sheet where the below-waist elastic members are disposed is reduced as compared with the lateral regions.

12. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein the elastic members of continuous length are cut at two or more positions in the portion substantially non-contributory to elastic extensibility and contractibility to form said cut fragments.

13. (New) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein the inner sheet is provided with an adhesive over the surface on the outer sheet side, while the region outside the lateral sides of each patterned sheet is provided with the adhesive, the region inside the lateral sides of each patterned sheet is not provided with the adhesive or is provided with a reduced amount of the adhesive as compared with the region outside the lateral sides of each patterned sheet.

14. (New) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein the front portion and the rear portion are provided with the patterned sheet, the patterned sheet is a single continuous sheet which extends from the below-waist portion of the front portion to the below-waist portion of the rear portion.

15. (New) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein the patterned sheet 8 is impermeable to liquid.